

VZCZCXYZ0000
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHQT #0345/01 0402131
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 092131Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6301
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA PRIORITY 6427
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 2357
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ FEB 0404
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 1397
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL PRIORITY 1861
RHMFISS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

UNCLAS QUITO 000345

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [EC](#)
SUBJECT: PROTESTS EXPECTED MONDAY OVER ASSEMBLY

REF: QUITO 274

11. (SBU) Summary: An overwhelming majority in Congress reportedly plans to approve the Government's proposed referendum on a national constituent assembly in a special session to commence on February 12, but will also seek to limit the assembly's scope and delay its start until 2008. Pro-assembly social groups including labor and indigenous organizations promise street action the same day, in protest against these changes to the government's original proposal. Unless a compromise is reached over the weekend, protests on the 12th could be significant. Police have agreed not to dislodge the protesters as long as they remain peaceful. End Summary.

New Assembly Statute Popular in Congress, not in Streets

12. (U) Media reported on February 9 that 88 (of 100) members of Congress are ready to approve the government's referendum proposal in a special permanent session on February 12, but with important changes to the accompanying assembly statute defining its terms. The revised assembly statute enjoys support from all major parties represented in Congress (Correa's Alianza PAIS movement is not represented there) except the indigenous Pachakutik movement (with six seats), the three far-left MPD members, two independents, and the lone Socialist member.

13. (U) The revised statute reportedly includes four important changes:

-- the Assembly would be limited to writing a new constitution, and prohibited from dissolving Congress or any other government institutions during its existence (vs. the unbounded charter for the Assembly in the government's version);

-- voting in the Assembly would be by 2/3 majority (vs. the absolute majority proposed by the government);

-- the government would be prohibited from campaigning on behalf of any Assembly candidates; and,

-- the Assembly would commence operation on January 5, 2008 (vs. 10 days after definitive results of Assembly elections, as proposed by the Government).

14. (U) Leaders of the labor, indigenous and social groups supporting an unbounded Assembly have reacted strongly against the proposed revisions, and promised to protest against it outside Congress and the National Palace in Quito

on the 12th. They also hope to disrupt dialogue between the Correa government and Congress over this proposal, criticizing the lack of transparency and expressing skepticism over both Congress' motives and Correa's "passivity." Radical leftist journalist Paco Velasco of Radio La Luna lashed out against Correa's handling of the referendum during his February 8 broadcast.

¶5. (U) At a formal military event on February 8, President Correa warned that "these do-nothing politicians ("politiqueros") are wasting their time" trying to delay the referendum. He defended his proposed candidates for Solicitor General (criticized as being unqualified by Congress) and insisted the only valid candidates for Attorney General are those nominated by the National Judicial Council. (The Constitutional Court invalidated the replacement of two members of the Council by the Supreme Court, casting doubt over the validity of the Council's nominees for the AG post.)

Protests: Indigenous Ready to Join

¶6. (SBU) Groups protesting Congress' proposed changes include organized labor, Afro-ecuadorians, activist NGOs, and the indigenous (including FEINE, the evangelical indigenous organization, and ECUAUNARI, the main Sierra indigenous umbrella group). Santiago de la Cruz, vice president of the CONAIE indigenous group (which includes ECUAUNARI), told PolOffs on February 7 that members of the pro-Assembly "Front" were increasingly skeptical of the government's commitment to its original proposal, having been "betrayed" on promised reforms before, by former president Lucio Gutierrez. Pachakutik leader Gilberto Talahua told the press on February 9 that indigenous protests during the week of February 12 would be peaceful. In recent years indigenous groups have been slow to turn out in Quito, with the exception of FEINE, but have repeatedly protested by blocking highways in their home Sierra provinces.

¶7. (SBU) Embassy police contacts tell us they have met with protest organizers and agreed not to attempt to disperse peaceful demonstrations unless they become violent. Demonstrators plan to gather in a park near the Embassy (the park is frequently used as a protest gathering point so its proximity to the Embassy is coincidental) at 9:00 am and march from there to the Congress and then the National Presidential Palace (in a direction away from the Embassy). The special session of Congress will not begin until 3:00 pm. Police did not provide estimates of protest numbers, nor information about possible protest activity in the provinces. Matching or even exceeding last week's estimated turnout of 3,000 is certainly possible.

Comment

¶8. (SBU) It is notable that the indigenous movements are now vowing some degree of mobilization--to date, demonstrators have been limited to the urban-based leftist political parties. With pressure from frustrated Assembly supporters mounting and being directed at both Congress and Correa, the government will try to convince a majority in Congress to accept a modified statute without the deal-breaking elements imposed by anti-Assembly factions. Congressional professional staff sources tell us they believe a compromise can be reached. Key to the government will be to eliminate the delayed start date; the Bolivian example will also make the issue of internal Assembly voting rules contentious. A new accord would help deflate planned street action by demonstrators.

¶9. (SBU) Failing that, Correa could use his weekly radio address to add fuel to the fire, egging on the demonstrators to pressure Congress from the streets. It remains to be seen whether the police will do a better job than they did on January 30, when pro-Assembly demonstrators forcibly entered the Congress building, and whether the indigenous actually

turn out in force in Quito. We will take precautions by issuing a warden notice advising AmCits to exercise caution, avoid crowds and protest routes on the 12th.

JEWELL